[Potter, Thomas]

THE EXPEDITION AGAINST *ROCHEFORT*

Fully STATED and CONSIDERED,

IN A

LETTER

To the RIGHT HONOURABLE [Henry Fox] the

AUTHOR

OF THE

CANDID REFLECTIONS

ON THE

REPORT

OF THE

GENERAL OFFICERS, &c.

By a COUNTRY GENTLEMAN.

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A LETTER, &c.

SIR,

YOU may, perhaps, be a little ſurpriſed at receiving a letter from me: Perſons of my deſcription are not eaſily found in the circle of your acquaintance, and you will be puzzled to gueſs my name; but no matter what is my name, or what my acquaintance with you, I might as well ask who that friend in the country was, to whom you have thought fit to addreſs your letter. I have lived a good many years among thoſe who are called country gentlemen, and never found that you had a ſingle friend among them; they know you too well. Let us ceaſe therefore to enquire who was your correſpondent, either when you wrote your own, or when you receive this letter. We both have our reaſon for the manner of addreſs.

You will wonder, perhaps, by what means I have traced this performance home to you. Whatever I am, I claim no title, I form no pretenſions to ſuperior ſagacity, or to a more extenſive intelligence, than others who bear the ſame character, which I, perhaps, aſſume; but the tree is known by its fruits, and the piece often betrays the workman. Whether the performance is of the hand of the great maſter himſelf, or whether it has only been ſketched out by him, and worked up by ſome inferior artiſt, I am not connoiſſeur enough to determine, but I know the ſchool. The world was enriched laſt winter with ſo many *teſts*, and ſo many other curious pieces in the ſame taſte, that it is impoſſible not to find out the hands. To you therefore I addreſs myſelf, as to the great fountain and ſource, without conſidering whether you have con-

conveyed your poiſon through your own maſterly pen, or transfuſed into the quill of ſome leſs noble, though ſtill, perhaps, truly noble, diſciple.

Your appearance on this occaſion juſtifies the advice you give to your friend in the 26th page of your great work. *Imagine ſpecifically what is moſt agreeable to common ſenſe, and then do not be ſurpriſed at finding the event diametrically oppoſite to it.* In the name of that common ſenſe, what have you, or any of your faction, to do, in being the partizans of thoſe perſons who are the objects of that report, whoſe unpopularity might, for a time perhaps, have eclipſed even yours, *unleſs* you were originally a party in their offence, and from thence are become bound to be a party in their juſtification. Thoſe who think you have a right to the attribute of common ſenſe, muſt be perſuaded that you are involved in this unfortunate deſcription. Mankind, indeed, had heard of the extraordinary aſſiduity with which you attended the general in c—f, from the moment of his return, to that of his trial; and that you was employed in the arduous buſineſs of drawing up his defence: yet they were diſpoſed to hope, that this proceeded only from the warmth of friendſhip, and if your diſcretion ſuffered in the opinions of the over-prudent, you was recompenſed by the honour which was reflected on your humanity. Why then would you not ſuffer it to reſt on a foundation ſo advantageous to you? Why would you confirm the imputations which mankind had, with too much appearance of plauſibility, thrown out upon you, that you and *yours* were the real authors of that diſgraceful diſappointment which the nation ſo deeply feels and reſents, and that the generals who have hitherto born the infamy, were but the puppets which you and *yours* have actuated.

You ſay, page the 18th, "The unpromiſingneſs of this "expedition was not judged of only by the event, but "numbers here, on knowing its deſtination for the coaſt "of France, and the conſtitution of things in thoſe parts, "made even no merit of *pronouncing boldly*, that *nothing* "*would*, or could be done by that grand armada." Once more, in the name of common ſenſe, why do you, of all men living, bring this circumſtance back to people's memory. It was well obſerved at the time, and did not paſs with-

without the natural comment, that a certain ſet of men, not famous for their extenſive knowledge, did, even long before the ſquadron ſailed, declare publicly, that *wherefoever* was its deſtination, *nothing would* be done by it. Mankind were aſtoniſhed at the *boldneſs* with which this was pronounced. They proceeded ſo far as to draw from this *boldneſs* a very ill omen of the ſucceſs. They went ſtill farther; for to this were entirely owing thoſe ſuſpicions, as you ſay page 6th, "Thoſe treaſonable inſinuations, that a tenderneſs for H—n—r might occaſion an "armament to be ſent out, with intimations properly given, that nothing being done would not be the moſt "diſpleaſing thing imaginable." They obſerved, that the perſons who thus *pronounced* with ſo much *boldneſs*, were the ſame, who, by their private intrigues and cabals, had, a few months before, thrown the affairs of the king and kingdom into ſo much confuſion; and it ſeemed no great refinement in politics to ſuppoſe, that the ſame influence which enabled them then to put a ſtop to all public buſineſs, might ſtill ſubſiſt to ſuch a degree, as would blaſt the expedition; for they know very well, as you ſay, page 5th, "The envy of ſome, who oppoſed the preſent miniſter's riſe to power, would be carried to ſuch treaſonable lengths, as ſecretly to thwart and countermine his "operations." Has the event proved that they were miſtaken in this apprehenſion? Or will this book of yours prove it?

You tell us, page the 13th, "That his royal highneſs "the Duke greatly deſired and preſſed this meaſure, in "hopes of its making a powerful diverſion;" and you refer us, as for a voucher, to the *Enq.* page 20. I have read that page in the *Enquiry* again and again, and I find nothing to warrant ſuch an aſſertion; I ſee, indeed, in that page, that Sir J. Ligonier informs the commander in chief of the land forces, what was one point in the King's view in this meaſure, "That it was to create a diverſion in fa"vour of his R. H. and the K. of Pruſſia, and that the K. "of Pruſſia deſired and preſſed this *very* meaſure:" But I find no intimation that it was the Duke's deſire. I find no reaſon to ſuppoſe that the plan had been communicated to him, or approved by him, much leſs recommended or preſſed by him for execution. I moſt heartily wiſh it had;

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for however widely you and I may differ in our reaſons, we ſhall both agree in one concluſion, that a plan approved and recommended by his R. H. would not have ſo ſhamefully failed without any attempt to execute it.

You tell us, page 5, that on the return of the fleet, "*Some, merely guided by private attachments*, or prejudices in "favour of the projectors, or at leaſt the principal promoter of the attempt, extolled it to the skies, and that on the "other hand others, *perhaps*, influenced by conſiderations "of the like private nature, by pique, prejudice, or envy, "treated the whole plan as chimerical, crude, indigeſted, "both in the projection and appointment of the execution, "from which no better, or other ſucceſs, could be expected than what befel it. That *the whole of it* was the "ſcheme of a man who wanted to value himſelf upon "what he did not underſtand, and who, rather than do "nothing, would do ſomething which was worſe than "nothing." One ſhould have ſuppoſed that an author of *candid reflections* would at leaſt have taken care to ſteer between theſe two partial opinions, which you yourſelf repreſent as the extreme on either ſide. And yet there is not a line in your whole candid performance which does not tend to ſupport this virulence againſt the miniſter.

But tho' you have undertaken to attack, I ſhall not undertake to defend him: I am not commiſſioned to it; I am not ſufficiently appriſed of thoſe facts which juſtify the plan of the expedition; but what I undertake to prove is, that you have no facts, or at leaſt you produce none, on which it ought to be condemned. Prejudiced, doubtleſs, I am, and prejudice will inſinuate itſelf into the mind of every diſputant, and every reader. You think, for inſtance, not only that the generals who commanded the expedition are to be juſtified *in having done no more*, but that they are in ſome degree blameable *for having done ſo much*, for the plan was wild, chimerical and abſurd. You are ſatisfied from the reputation of the generals, that if the fault had not lain in the plan, there could have been no failure in the execution. I, on my part, am perſuaded that a plan (no matter who projected it) approved on the utmoſt deliberation by his majeſty, and unanimouſly approved by his privy council, undertaken on a full examination of facts, by theſe very generals, without proteſt or remonſtrance,

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approved and desired by the king of Prussia, (for the king of Prussia, we find, *Enq.* p. 20. desires and presses this very measure) and prepared under the immediate inspection of Sir John Ligonier, then, as well as now, commander in chief of the king's forces, could not be a project so totally repugnant to common sense, as you chuse to represent it. These, indeed, are names which make a different impression on you and me. Your opinion of his ** *, or at least your representation of him, is perhaps apt to vary with circumstances. When he submits to be directed by you and yours, he is every thing that is great and noble: But if he displeases you or yours, we need go no farther for your sentiments, than to that famous manuscript, which has been, so busily, and yet so cautiously handed about, wherein he is represented as deceiving the whole world, exposing his favourite son, as betraying the safety of his E——l territories, the possessions of his subjects, the honour of his arms, his family, and his name, for the sake of preserving his private treasures, and avoiding the expence of an army necessary for the defence of his country, which he so often and so solemnly had declared was an effective army, and yet in fact never subsisted hardly even upon paper. How false this assertion was, subsequent events have proved. As to the king of Prussia, we all know how much his military skill has been, with great uniformity, derided by you and your favourite heroes: A man wild, impetuous, impracticable, ignorant of the art of war, and as unqualified to be a general as Mr. Pitt is to be a minister. The present commander in chief of the British troops we know too, is no favourite with you and *yours*. The people of this country have indeed long considered him as the first soldier, tho' till lately a very subordinate officer in the service. They will never forget the services he has done this country. British armies, with their general, saved from instant destruction, by his superior skill in his profession, by his capacity to see, and his readiness and alertness to seize an advantage over his enemy, will ever endear him to the friends of England, and the royal family. But perhaps this very merit, which will never be forgot by his grateful country, will never be forgiven by individuals.

Page 7th and 8th, your firſt objection ſeems to be the conſtitution of the board of enquiry. You adopt an expreſſion, which perhaps you firſt ſuggeſted to the general, *That it was a proceeding not quite common.* And you ſuggeſt your doubts about the legality, as well as propriety, of ſuch an enquiry. I will anſwer this fully, at leaſt *ad hominem.* The firſt inſtitution of a board of general officers for the purpoſe of enquiring into the conduct of a commander, took place under the auſpices of his royal highneſs *William* duke of *Cumberland*, at that time commander in chief of the *Britiſh* forces: an officer was judged, *condemned*, and ruined by that board of enquiry, *without any other trial.* Would you have any other anſwer to this objection? or ſhall I comment upon it? or make compariſons? but if ever ſuch an enquiry was right and proper, it was ſo in the preſent caſe, where the parties to be tried had agreed upon a total ſuppreſſion of evidence. In the very council of war, which unanimouſly reſolved to do nothing, far from a deſire to ſtate the evidence on which they proceeded, and their reſpective opinions upon that evidence, which one would think natural to every one who was ſollicitous for his honour and juſtification, the firſt thing reſolved on was to take no minutes of opinions, and that even the informations of the perſons examined ſhould not ſtand part of the minutes, ſo as to be *tranſmitted to any perſon*; *Enq.* p. 10. Here then, as far as in them lay, was a total ſuppreſſion of evidence.

But, ſays one of the generals, I do not conceive myſelf anſwerable for an opinion given at a council of war: therefore it may be urged, why are minutes of what paſſes here neceſſary? I confeſs I am ſorry to find this doctrine ſo much received among officers, that they are not reponſible for opinions given at a council of war, becauſe the nature of mankind is too apt to perſuade him, that there can be no faults where there is not a poſſibility of puniſhment. I therefore will never admit this doctrine in the extent it is often urged. Criminally reſponſible for his opinion no officer can be, becauſe it is not an offence againſt any article of war; but what then? is the opinion, on the evidence on which it is founded to be ſuppreſſed? and is not an officer reſponſible to his king and country in any other place than a court martial? God forbid that ſuch a doctrine ſhould be eſtabliſhed.

A court martial which judges upon the letter of the law, upon the ſtrict words of articles of war, or a penal act of parliament, may acquit of capital crimes a conduct which nevertheleſs evinces the officers, who have been guilty of it, to be unfit for any future command. It is the words of poſitive laws, which in a free country are to make men liable to puniſhments; but it is the prerogative of the crown to judge, upon the whole of the circumſtances, who are fit to continue in its ſervice, and to command its armies.

But you are not ſatisfied with the perſonages appointed to form this board, and in an ironic paragraph, page 7, you inſinuate how unfit they were to judge of ſuch a matter, by telling us what qualifications were neceſſary to ſuch judges. Before I conſider their qualifications, let me ask you a queſtion, Who do you think appointed them? the king, you will doubtleſs ſay: it was his prerogative. But who do you think recommended them? I ask this of you, becauſe I am perſuaded *your intelligence on this head* is better than mine. But I will tell you who, I verily believe, did not recommend them. I believe Mr. *Pitt* did not; and the world, when they read thoſe reſpectable names, will not be of opinion, that, conſidering the known and declared friendſhips, connections, and attachments of the *majority of them*, they were preciſely *the three men* on whoſe deciſion Mr. *Pitt* would willingly reſt a point, which many of his enemies, and you at the head of them, endeavoured to make a point, on which his capacity as a miniſter was to be determined. Whatever qualities they had, or had not, to fit them for the judges in ſuch an enquiry, they certainly had no partiality in favour of the projectors of, and againſt thoſe who ought to have executed the plan of the expedition. As to their capacity and knowledge of ſervice, when I conſider and contemplate the glorious liſt of heroes, to whoſe command the army of this country has been for ſo many years confided, I confeſs myſelf at a loſs, thro' the infinite variety of choice, to point out the perſons whoſe conſummate knowledge might give the greateſt weight to their deciſion: yet I ſay, and I ſay it ſeriouſly, that if experience, ſuch as the armies of this country can give, founded upon ſtrong manly ſenſe, an active ſpirit, and a penetrating ſagacity, can qualify a man to judge in a queſtion of this ſort, it was to be found among thoſe who ſat at this board of enquiry.

Before I proceed to conſider the conduct of the generals, &c. I ſhall follow you in ſome of your previous ſteps, tho' they are not ſteps in which I delight to walk. In order to form a judgment on the practicability of the meaſure, you are ſenſible a queſtion will occur to every man; What was the force which our troops were likely to meet at, and after their deſcent? to make this favourable to your point, you are pleaſed to avail yourſelf, p. 9, 10, of accounts, which you think fit to inform us were circulated in *Holland*, and other neutral countries, of the ſtate of the troops of *France*, which were ſaid to amount to 300,000. The memorial delivered in by authority makes them ſomething leſs than 200,000. You ſay you don't diſpute the truth of this account, but you inſinuate the general opinion to be, that they are above 300,000 regulars. But the military liſts of *France*, you ſay, are open, and it would be unpardonable not to have a thorough knowledge of that point. But pray, Sir, how is one to attain that thorough knowledge? do you expect a certificate from the muſter-maſter-general of *France*, (if there be ſuch an officer) or what other information do you demand? the beſt that can be obtained, unleſs from immediate authority of the king of *France*, (and perhaps the beſt, even without that exception) is what the privy council had before them. Look into the memorial. Can you have a more exact account, than the very corps of which the army conſiſts; their numbers in time of peace; their different augmentations ſince the war commenced, and their preſent deſtination? how does it appear that the memorial is not taken from thoſe very military liſts to which you appeal? but the point was too ſtrong againſt you, to be ſuffered to remain in full force, and therefore you endeavour to contradict particular accounts, delivered by authority, by vague reports, which you are pleaſed to ſay were current in other countries. How ſuch reports came to your ears, I cannot imagine! I believe you are the firſt man of buſineſs who ever attempted to paſs ſuch a report on the world. But that you may make as free with my intelligence as I have done with yours, I will tell you a report which I have heard, and I fancy from rather better authority than your *Dutch* report, That ſo far were the *French* from having the troops on the coaſt which you inſinuate, and which I think, if all collected together, as in your different accounts, would amount

mount to about 100,000 regulars, beſides 100,000 militia, there were actually but 4000 regular troops at the time our fleet came upon the coaſt, for the defence of all the garriſons and outworks in and near *Port l'Orient*, *la Rochelle*, and *Rochefort*, and that the ſmaller diviſion of theſe was at *Rochefort*. I will now communicate another report; You, as well as the generals, ſeem to ſtand in great awe of a name ſo dignified as a marſhal of *France*. You ſpeak, in different places, of the alertneſs of the enemy on this occaſion, and the proportionable reſiſtance which our troops muſt undoubtedly have met with, if they attempted to land. Yet what was the real caſe? the old marſhal, worn out with infirmities, *ne faiſoit que pleurer*. Such were the accounts the *French* themſelves gave of him. He conſidered all as loſt, the moment the attack was pointed at *Rochefort*, and far from making diſpoſitions to diſpute the landing, he paſſed the hours in tears, and in writing expreſſes to his court.

Page 11. You pretend not fully to underſtand the meaning of the term *Coup de main*. You attempt definitions of it: from its vague and uncertain import, you would inſinuate that it was hardly underſtood by our generals what they were to do, but you argue as if by a *Coup de main*, was meant, only a ſurprize, and that if the opportunity of a ſurprize was loſt, the whole proſpect of ſucceſs was over. I ſhall enter into no ſcholaſtick diſpute about the definitions of terms. I will only ſay, that it is very apparent, that the term *Coup de main* was not uſed to expreſs the taking Rochefort *by ſurprize only*, but that it was to be attacked in every other way, except the opening trenches, and erecting batteries.

In the advice delivered by Sir John Ligonier, whoſe experience in the art of war, Sir J. Mordaunt ſays, will vindicate any officer guided by his authority, I find this paragraph, *Enq.* p. 22. " As for a *Coup de main*, it may " perhaps ſucceed *beſt* at your coming up, as the enemy " may be in a great hurry, ſurprize, and conſternation, at " ſuch an unexpected viſit, and not have time to make " his diſpoſitions. But if that is not thought proper, it " may *ſucceed as well after the place has been thoroughly re-* " *connoitred*, and you have fixed the ſpots where you de- " ſign to make the greateſt efforts, and if the enemy ſee

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" any preparations for a regular attack, they will leſs ex-
" pect a *Coup de main*. Bergen-op-Zoom was taken by a
" *Coup de main*, after a long ſiege. St. Philip's was taken
" by ſcaling ladders, and a *Coup de main*, tho' the garri-
" ſon was 3000 ſtrong, after a ſiege of 56 days: the ne-
" ceſſity of dividing a ſmall garriſon in a place of ſuch
" circumference as *Rochefort* may facilitate the ſucceſs of
" a bold attempt." If Sir John Mordaunt really thought Sir J. Ligonier to be a man of that experience in the art of war which he deſcribes him to be; if he really meant to guide himſelf by the whole of his advice in the execution of the plan, and not to excuſe himſelf, only by ſelecting certain parts of it from others which were explanatory, and with which they were connected, how come he ſo totally to have forgot this part of it, which, if any doubt had ſubſiſted, would have explained what was intended by a *Coup de main*, and to remember only the recommendation to ſecure a communication for a retreat? nay of what ſort was that communication to be? ſee the ſame paper, *Enq.* p. 21. " Suppoſing the troops landed, it muſt be left to
" the conſideration of the generals whether they ſhould
" not march with proper precautions *directly* to Rochefort,
" to prevent any ſuccours being thrown into the place, at
" the ſame time that the marines ſhould be employed for
" making a good intrenchment for the ſecurity of the
" ſtores to be landed from time to time, as well as of a
" retreat in caſe of neceſſity." Here then vaniſhes at once all that part of your argument, and of the general's defence, which is founded upon the plan of attack being intended to take the place only by ſurprize. Here vaniſhes all the weight which was to be derived from the advice of Sir John Ligonier, with regard to the neceſſity of fort Fouras, being *taken before the troops were landed*, in order to ſecure a retreat. Sir J. Ligonier ſuppoſes the troops firſt to land, and then to throw up an intrenchment, in order to ſecure a retreat, and to receive and preſerve the ſtores as they were landed.

Another argument, which you endeavour to force into your ſervice, is the countenance given by the concurrence of the ſea-officers, to the opinion of that council of war which determined to do nothing againſt Rochefort. Let us ſee what Sir Edward Hawke ſays on the ſubject: in

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his letter to Mr. Secretary Pitt, *Enq.* p. 101, are theſe words: "We (meaning the ſeamen) aſſented to the reaſons for not attempting to take Rocheſort by eſcalade, in confidence of *their* (meaning the land officers) judgment and knowledge in *their own* profeſſion; *but I and every one elſe agreed in opinion, that the landing could be effected.*" What therefore is the inference to be drawn from hence, but this: the ſeamen were perſuaded they could effect the whole of their duty; they could land the troops: as to what the troops could do when landed, it was not their province to judge: it was the buſineſs of the generals to determine; and they ſigned their names to the council of war, not in teſtimony of their own opinion, but in deference to the opinion of thoſe whoſe province it was to judge and determine. That is, they acted conſiſtently with the king's inſtructions, to live in harmony with the land officers, and not to give occaſion of diſcontent, by intermeddling, proteſting, and remonſtrating, in what was not their province; but ſo weary does Sir Edward Hawke appear to have been of theſe councils of war, that when Sir John Mordaunt applied to him, to call one, to conſider of the return of the fleet, Sir Edward refuſed, alledging that the ſeamen had nothing to do with it; it was a land operation only. *Enq.* p. 35.

You are pleaſed to object to the teſtimony and opinion of colonel Clerk, as deſerving leſs weight, becauſe it was upon his repreſentation that the attempt on Rochefort was firſt thought of; and he, you think, is bound in honour to ſupport the practicability, that is, the honour of his own plan: but you think, at the ſame time, that the higheſt credit is to be given to the very names of the officers of which the council of war was compoſed, forgetting that they are the very parties to to be tried, and that their teſtimony is brought forth for their own condemnation or acquital.

I have thus endeavoured to demoliſh that outwork of prejudice with which you have endeavoured to intrench yourſelf: ſo far goes the *coup de main*, and now if you pleaſe, we will begin the attack in form.

The report of the board of general officers, which was the ground work of your letter, muſt likewiſe be ſo of mine. You have concluded, and I will begin with it; for the plan of that report will give a regularity to

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our arguments ; and as that has conſidered every part of the conduct of the generals, it will bring on all that can be urged for or againſt them, from the evidence hitherto made public in a regular method.

The firſt article of the report is, " It appears that one cauſe of the expedition having failed, is the not attacking fort Fouras by ſea, at the ſame time that it would have been attacked by land, agreeable to the firſt deſign, which certainly muſt have been of the greateſt utility towards carrying your majeſty's inſtructions into execution: it was at firſt reſolved by Sir Edward Hawke, (Thierry the pilot of the Magnanime having undertaken the ſafe conduct of a ſhip to fort Fouras for that purpoſe) but afterwards *laid aſide upon the repreſentation of vice admiral* Knowles, that the Barfleur, the ſhip deſigned for that ſervice, was on ground at the diſtance of between four or five miles from the ſhore, but as neither " Sir Edward Hawke nor the pilot could attend to give any information upon that head, we cannot preſume to offer a certain opinion thereupon."

This is the firſt article of the report, which, after having told us, p. 22. that it is a moſt admirable piece, calculated, as if by compromiſe, neither to acquit or condemn, you tell us, p. 23. ſhews that at leaſt ſo far the commanders are in no fault. If they are in no fault they are acquitted, and I am ready to allow, that ſo far as this article goes, the commanders of the land forces are acquitted; but if you will argue farther, that all the commanders who were to conduct the expedition were in no fault, eſpecially if you inſiſt as you do, p. 23. " that it appears plain, that Fouras was inacceſſible to ſhipping, notwithſtanding the pilot Thierry's promiſe, which it ſhould ſeem he could not make good; I totally deny your concluſion. A child in argument muſt ſee the fallacy of it. If the fact was clear that Fouras was inacceſſible to ſhipping, how comes it to paſs that the not attacking it is given as a cauſe of the failure of the expedition. No poſitive opinion was given, you ſay, upon it. Why was it not, and where was the neceſſity of leaving this point open for farther enquiry, after the return of Sir Edward Hawke and the pilot, if it already appeared to be a meaſure impracticable? But *impracticable*

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is the word, and every thing is to be, from beginning to end, pronounced impracticable. I ſay that it appears to be far from certain, that fort Fouras was inacceſſible to ſhipping, and yet the board of officers did right to give no opinion, becauſe Sir Edward Hawke and Thierry, parties principally concerned, had not been heard, I will enter farther into the conſideration of this matter, for ſome concluſion may be drawn from it; it is a thing ſo aſtoniſhing, that (as you ſay) *a ſet of gentlemen, of untainted character, and truſted with the arms of their country, could be ſo groſsly wanting to its honour and their own, as to return back with ſo bad a grace*, that it behoves us to throw all the light on this tranſaction, which any circumſtance can produce, even though the land officers are not concerned in the event. But whoever is to blame, the nation is concerned in the event; for they bear the loſs and the infamy of the miſcarriage.

It appears from the evidence of vice admiral Knowles, (Enq. p. 44.) that the whole affair of this attack upon Fouras was delegated by Sir Edward Hawke to his inſpection, and that Sir Edward had proceeded ſo far in the execution of the plan, as to direct his ſecretary to begin an order to lighten the Barfleur for that purpoſe. But this was laid aſide, upon the remonſtrances of capt. Greaves and vice admiral Knowles, that the Barfleur was a-ground at between four and five miles from the ſhore; that then Sir Edward Hawke ordered him to try to carry the bomb-ketches in, which he did, and run them a-ground at more than two miles and two thirds of a mile diſtance from fort Fouras, where they were likely to have been taken by row-boats: That then he run the Coventry frigate a-ground five times within the hour, at a greater diſtance from the ſhore than the bomb-ketch. That *then* (and it ſeems not till then) *he ſent his maſter to ſound*, and found that at *two miles* diſtance from the fort, there was but ſix foot water at high water. All theſe notable exploits were performed by vice admiral Knowles; the ſame, who it is ſaid, adviſed Sir Edward Hawke not even to enter the road of Baſque, leſt he ſhould be bombarded; the ſame, one has formerly heard and read of in courts-martial; the ſame, who on a late p——y enquiry, had the happineſs to boaſt ſuch pecu-

liar protection and countenance from you, Sir; the ſame, who (as I have heard) detained the ſquadron two days in ſight of the French coaſt, becauſe he had ſent away the pilot, deſtined to conduct it, upon a chace after a French ſhip. But I will not recapitulate his virtues or his merit. It was upon the remonſtrance of this vice admiral, whoſe ſtation in command entitled him, at leaſt, to ſo much confidence from his ſuperior officer, (that the reſolution to attack fort Fouras by ſea was laid aſide. Now, then, let me relate to you the reaſons which induce me to believe, that notwithſtanding this report of vice admiral Knowles, fort Fouras was acceſſible by ſea, tho' the vice admiral had not *the good fortune* to find out the channel.

In the firſt place, then, tho' I have by no means that high opinion of the French wiſdom and ability which you entertain, and on every occaſion extol ſo highly; yet I do ſuppoſe, that in matters of defence, they do conduct themſelves on principles ſimilar to thoſe which are adopted by the reſt of mankind. I do ſuppoſe, for inſtance, that when they built a fort, it is intended either to defend or offend. Fouras was weak to the land; it ſtood at the water's edge to guard the channel; it ſtood even on a bank which ran into the water; and as Col. Wolfe, who ſeems to be the firſt officer who thought of reconnoitring it, tells us, Enq. p. 30, it had 24 embraſures to the water ſide. What was the uſe of this fort? Was it to guard a bank of ſand over which ſcarce a Thames wherry could paſs? If the guns of no ſhip whatever could reach the fort, could the guns of the fort reach any ſhip? According to Mr. Knowles, there was no channel at all, or it lay out of gunſhot of the fort. At two miles diſtance the vice-admiral's maſter found but ſix feet water at high-water; at near three miles diſtance the bomb-ketch, which drew but eleven foot water, went a-ground. The Coventry frigate did the ſame further out than that, and the *Barfleur* at a ſtill greater diſtance. Now, tho' *after* all this delay, and hazard to the ſhips, that admiral thought fit to ſound, and try the depth of water *at a diſtance from the fort, where no cannon could reach*; yet it is aſtoniſhing to find not a ſingle proof attempted to be given of the depth of the water near the ſhore, and

within gunſhot of the fort. Is it impoſſible then that the channel, a narrow one, might run in ſhore? Is it not demonſtrable that it did ſo, both from the circumſtance of the thing, and the evidence of thoſe who knew, and had navigated it? What ſays Bonneau, the fiſherman; examined by general Conway, and others, *Enq.* p. 53, There were four fathom (24 foot) water at half cannon ſhot from fort Fouras, a depth ſufficient for a 60 gun ſhip. Now, tho' the land officers did not chuſe to truſt to the intelligence of a fiſherman for the ſtate of the fortifications at Rochefort, yet it ſeems to be the beſt evidence as to the depth of the channel that could have been wiſhed. There was the united teſtimony of Thierry and Bonneau, joined to the reaſon of the thing, that there muſt be a channel within gunſhot of the fort, tho' the ſhips miſſed the entrance of it. I might add, that tho' the vice-admiral could not conduct a ſhip to the fort, there were captains in the fleet who it ſeems offered it: Capt. Colby offered to carry the Princeſs Amelia. *Enq.* p. 30. How then can we unriddle this myſtery, for a myſtery there certainly is? Perhaps it is eaſier to gueſs the ſolution than to explain it.

From all theſe circumſtances, I ſay it is clear that Fouras muſt be, and was acceſſible by ſea; that the board of officers are therefore juſtified in the report, that the not attacking it by ſea appeared to be one of the cauſes of the failure of the expedition. I have ſaid this merely to juſtify the report of the board; for the conduct of the generals ſeems to me ſo little affected by this article, and indeed, ſo totally independent of it, that from this moment, if you chuſe it, I will ſuppoſe that Fouras was built only to guard a ſand-bank, and that it was inacceſſible to every thing but a long-boat.

The next article in the report is, "That another cauſe "of the failure of the expedition was, that inſtead of at- "tempting to land when the report was received on the "24th of September from rear-admiral Broderick, and "the captains who had been ſent out to ſound and recon- "noitre, a council of war ſummoned, and held on the "25th, in which it was unanimouſly reſolved not to "land, as the attempt upon Rochefort was neither adviſ- "able nor practicable. But it does not appear to us that

"there were then, or at any time afterwards, either a "body of troops, or batteries on ſhore, ſufficient to have "prevented the attempting a deſcent, in purſuance of the "inſtructions ſigned by your majeſty. Neither does it "appear to us, that there were any ſufficient reaſons "to induce the council of war to believe, that Rochefort "was ſo far changed in reſpect to its ſtrength, or poſture "of defence ſince the expedition was reſolved on in Eng-"land, as to prevent all attempts from an attack upon "the place, in order to burn and deſtroy the docks, ma-"gazines, arſenals, and ſhipping, in obedience to your "majeſty's command." Is this, Sir, the part of the report, which you ſay is ſo far from carrying cenſure, that the commanders (I mean the land commanders) might, even glory in avowing and ſubſcribing to it? Is this the part *which you ſay does honour to their ſenſe and obedience?* Let us ſtate it in fewer words: a cauſe of failure in this expedition was, that the generals, inſtead of landing on the 24th of September, when the report of thoſe ſent to reconnoitre was made, called a council of war on the 25th, and reſolved not to land. Yet there was no reaſon which prevented their having landed as they were ordered. Nor do we think the council of war had any reaſon to imagine, that the ſituation of Rochefort appeared now ſo different from what it was repreſented to be when the expedition was firſt fet on foot, as to make it impoſſible to execute their orders.

If this is obedience, if this is matter of glory to a ſoldier, in the name of common ſenſe, what is diſobedience; and what can he do to deſerve ſhame and diſhonour? can it be aſſerted in ſtronger terms that the expedition failed, becauſe the council of war, *without any reaſon to juſtify ſuch a reſolution*, determined it to be impracticable and unadviſable to execute their orders? If you ſay that the determination does not declare in poſitive and expreſs terms, that the expedition was originally prudent and adviſable, you ſay true: ſuch a declaration would have been very unbecoming the board of officers, to whoſe conſideration that queſtion was by no means referred. They were to conſider whether the officers had ſufficient foundation to juſtify the non-execution of their orders, and they make the proper anſwer to ſuch a queſtion, that from what appears

pears to them, thoſe officers had not ſuch a ſufficient foundation as could juſtify them. I dare ſay they took care to avoid giving their opinions on more than was referred to them; in ſo doing they ſhewed their capacity and their knowledge of their duty. And yet, notwithſtanding their care to avoid it, an approbation of the original plan is moſt manifeſtly and neceſſarily *implied*, in this deciſion; for if Rochefort was open to attack, no one doubts but it was wiſe to attempt it, yet with all the changes which the generals could prove to have been made in its ſtrength and poſture of defence, ſince the expedition was firſt reſolved on, it did not appear to be even *now* in ſuch a ſtate as to prevent all attempts of an attack. Yet no ſuch attempts were made.

But you ſeem to be ſo intent on condemning the original plan, that, like the council of war, you forgot the point which ought to be under conſideration. Suppoſe the plan to be as wild as you repreſent it, are the officers juſtifiable in their diſobedience of orders? By no means. The firſt duty of a ſoldier is obedience: obedience not only to the command of a ſuperior officer, but to the ſtate who employs him: his life is not his own, it belongs to the ſtate. Such are the very terms of his ſervice, ſuch the conditions on which he is maintained by the public. If he is ordered to an attack, he is not to ask whether he can get back, and yet he is to take the beſt precautions to enable him to get back. It it as much a part of his duty to preſerve, as to expoſe himſelf, *provided he performs his orders*. But is a private officer, or a collection of officers in council (for the number does not alter their condition) to ſay, My orders are ridiculous, and I will not execute them? Who conſtituted them counſellors of ſtate, and ſubmitted the propriety of their orders to their deciſion?

This is and muſt be the caſe where orders are expreſs and poſitive. Where indeed diſcretionary orders are given, there ariſes a latitude and power of judging. Such was undoubtedly the preſent caſe. The generals had diſcretionary orders, but what was the Point to be the ſubject of their diſcretion? Was it whether their original orders were fit to be executed, ſuppoſing the caſe to be as repreſented when the orders were given? Undoubted-

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ly not. It had been before determined by the king, that is by the ſtate, that on the apparent ſtate of Rochefort, it ought to be attacked. They were therefore to uſe their utmoſt efforts to land and attack it. But it was left to their diſcretion to deſiſt, if they found by undoubted proof, that the caſe, *as it exiſted*, was become materially changed from what had been *repreſented*. That alone was the object of their diſcretion, and therefore the board of officers concluded like men, knowing the duty of ſoldiers, that thoſe who conſtituted the council of war had failed in theirs, for they deſiſted from the enterprize without ſuch a material change of circumſtances appearing. I do not indeed wonder, that on this occaſion you ſhould have been led into an error. You are ſo much connected with ſoldiers accuſtomed to aſſume the offices of ſtateſmen, that you have been naturally led to confound their duty.

Let us examine then on what foundation the board of enquiry have grounded this ſevere cenſure. If Fouras could have been attacked by ſea, undoubtedly one or more of the ſea commanders failed in their duty. But does it follow, that becauſe the ſea-officers were guilty of a failure, the land officers were juſtified in their immediate reſolution to go home again? Undoubtedly not. Was Fouras ſo abſolutely neceſſary, that without an attack upon it from the ſea, it was impoſſible to land, and did it, *upon full enquiry*, appear impracticable to take it by land, without the aſſiſtance of ſea operations? Neither of theſe juſtifications can the council of war boaſt. The admirals and captains report two fit landing places independant of Fouras. Enq. p. 15. And as to the taking that fort by land without a ſea operation, it does not appear ſo much as to have entered into the heads of any of the council, even to order it to be reconnoitred with a view of taking it, and making it a place of retreat, tho' all the generals concur that the principal objection to the attack at Rochefort, was the want of a place of retreat; and Sir John Mordaunt declares, Enq. p. 28. That had fort Fouras been taken, *there would have been great eaſe in the reſt of the enterprize*; ſurely then it was the higheſt imputation on the council of war, never to have conſidered this point, *till after they had determined* to lay aſide the only meaſure which made the fort worth attacking:

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But to go ſtep by ſtep, let us conſider the difficulties which prevented the attempt to land. Sir Edward Hawke, in his letter to Mr. Pitt, Enq. p. 101, ſays, *He, and every one elſe, were of opinion the landing might be effected.* The admiral, and reconnoitring captains, report, Enq. p. 102. two convenient landing-places, where the tranſports might come within a mile and an half of the ſhore, and where no batteries on the ſhore could annoy the landing. Admiral Broderick ſays, Enq. p. 45. that the landing was ſo good, "that he could have got out of the boats without wetting his ſhoes." That no ſhot from any battery could reach the boats. That men of war could come within two miles. That the ſand hills were forty yards diſtant from high water mark. That the bomb-ketches, if they could come near enough, might have been uſeful to annoy any troops hid behind the ſand hills; and p. 44. admiral Knowles ſays, a bomb, at an elevation of 45 degrees, will go two miles and two thirds.

This account of the landing-places in Chatelaillon Bay, is not controverted by the general in chief, or any of the reſt of the council of war. But the objections they raiſe are of two ſorts. "Numbers of troops hid behind the ſand hills, which might cut off the parties as faſt as they landed: a difficulty of getting back again to the ſhips even when landed, as it was clear from the evidence of diſcreet and experienced pilots, that if the wind blew weſterly from the bay, as there was great reaſon to expect it would at that ſeaſon, boats could not come or go to the ſhips even for many weeks together:" As to the troops hid behind the ſand hills, let us ſee what evidence there was of any number collected for ſuch a purpoſe.

In the firſt place I muſt beg leave to inſiſt, that it becomes the generals to give credit to the intelligence which they received from the government, and upon which the plan of the expedition was undertaken, till they had ſufficient authority *either from what they ſaw*, or from *credible and poſitive information*, to doubt or disbelieve the truth of it. Such facts and intelligence as they could obtain, they were to believe in proportion to the credibility of it, but they were not in contradiction to the poſitive intelligence communicated to them by the government, to act upon their own reaſoning, as general Conway tells you he did (Enq. p. 36.) that though *he knew of no conſiderable*

army in the field, yet he was *perſuaded there muſt be* a conſiderable number of men in Rochefort. The poſitive intelligence communicated by the government informed them, that there were in fact but 10,000 regular troops to guard a moſt immenſe tract of coaſt, furniſhed with forts and fortifications, in each of which there muſt have been ſome proportion of regular troops. A great number of theſe were doubtleſs at Breſt. Sir John Mordaunt in his defence (Enq. p. 13. 14.) ſays he had intelligence of above 7000 there. And his reaſoning goes no further than to ſay (Enq. p. 17.) that what ſeemed *certain* on the whole was, that though it was *poſſible* there might be no army aſſembled to engage them in the field, it was highly *improbable* there was not *a good garriſon* in Rochefort. Allow for the preſent that there was, would the governor of it have deſerted his works, and marched into the open field with a complement of troops, amounting only to *a good garriſon*. Troops were to be left within the walls; there muſt be more in Fort la Pointe, more in Fort Fouras, and ſo extenſive were the works at Rochefort and Rochelle, and the forts dependent on them, all of which were liable to be attacked, that if the whole 10,000 men, which guarded ſuch a length of coaſt, had been aſſembled in theſe two places, it would have been impoſſible to have ſpared ſuch a number as could have marched to the coaſt to give a ſerious oppoſition to the landing. As to the poſitive intelligence of troops aſſembled, let us ſee what it amounts to. Admiral Broderick ſaw an army *in the field* (Enq. p. 45.) amounting to 400 or 500 foot and 150 horſe. General Conway ſays (Enq. p. 36.) that one priſoner had ſaid there were eleven battalions, and another ſeven, but not in the field, but at Rochelle; and though he paid little regard to them ſingly, yet on the whole, he thought there was no room to doubt but there were *ſome troops*. (Enq. p. 31.) Captain Skinner, of the Viper ſloop, told colonel Howard, that on Sunday or Monday he ſaw a conſiderable number of troops, and that he reckoned eight or nine pair of colours *. But whether they were regular troops, or troops of the country, he could not tell. Enq. p. 32. And I think Sir John Mordaunt ſays, that the priſoners

* There are three ſtandards to each battalion, and a French battalion is generally computed at 500 men.

ſoners declared there were troops, *and even named regiments*. Enq. p. 17.

What is there in this ſum total of evidence on this point, to vary the intelligence given to the generals before they ſailed. They were told there were *ſome* troops, regiments, and even battalions; but what credible evidence was there to induce them to ſuppoſe they were too numerous for the troops on board the fleet to cope with?

But how could our troops have been landed? In the firſt place admiral Knowles, in concurrence with the admiral and captains who went to reconnoitre, "had *aſſured* "*them there were two landing places out of the reach of any* "*battery*; that the beach was dry, ſandy, and firm, and "the ſoldier need not have wetted his ſhoes in getting "out of the boat; that the men of war [which drew "from 20 to 30 foot water] might have come within two "miles; and though the cannon from them could not "annoy the troops, if there were any behind the ſand-"hills, yet the bomb ketches might, which throw a "bomb two miles and two thirds; and which, as they "drew but eleven feet water, might have come (probab-"ly) as near as the tranſports." So that the men might have landed under cover of the bombs, which, as the ſand hills were but forty yards from the water edge, muſt have cleared the ground for conſiderably more than a mile beyond the ſand hills.

As to the number of troops that could have landed at a time, it ſeems aſtoniſhing, that this ſhould never have been conſidered by the generals, I may ſay, till they wanted an excuſe to come home again. For Col. Wolfe depoſes, Enq. p. 21. that he believes there never was an exact calculation made how many could have embarked at a time in the boats: what a noble foreſight in the generals! He thinks, however, that thirty ſix companies of 60 men, with their officers, might have embarked at a time; in all above two thouſand and two hundred. And how long would it have been before theſe could have been ſupported by ſuch another body? Would it have been two hours? that, certainly, is the very utmoſt. Hitherto, indeed, the generals, and their advocates, have been pleaſed to calculate the intermediate neceſſary time between landing the detachments, from what would have happen-

ed on the turbulent and tempeſtuous night of the 28th, when the ſea ran ſo peculiarly high, that the ableſt ſeamen differed whether they could reach the land or not: even then it would have been done in five or ſix hours, or not at all. It is moſt evident, therefore, that in the courſe of a night, between dark and night, the whole body of troops on board the fleet might have been aſſembled in a dry, ſandy, firm beach, under the protection of bomb ketches, which would have cleared the ground for a mile beyond them: why then was not this done in the nights either of the 24th, 25th, 26th, or 27th, during which time there is no appearance that the ſurf of the ſea would have given any obſtruction.

I may be miſtaken in terms; I am neither ſoldier nor ſailor; I pretend only to ſuch knowledge as flows from common ſenſe and common reaſon.

As to the great difficulties ariſing from the *poſſibility* of a wind ſetting in from the bay, which for ſix weeks together might prevent a communication with the ſhips, I muſt be excuſed if I lay little ſtreſs upon it, becauſe, though this is ſet forth with all due magnificence, when it is to juſtify the generals in the non-obedience of their orders, and when they did not chuſe to land; yet neither this, nor the terror of armies behind the ſand hills, had the leaſt influence, when they found themſelves diſpoſed to leave the coaſt with the glory of having taken Fort Fouras, yet the difficulties were then greater, through the tempeſtuous weather. You do well to ſay, that in this the generals did too much, and it was an *imprudence*. They did not indeed. They did not infinitely too much for their country, but they did infinitely too much for their juſtification. When their duty, the execution of their orders, the honour and intereſt of their country, call upon them to act, difficulties are raiſed as high as mountains, but they ſink inſtantly to mole hills, or, what is as ridiculous, to ſand hills, the moment it becomes a conſideration, whether it would not be ſafer for the generals to do ſomething which may allay the national clamour againſt them.

Let us now conſider how far they are juſtified, by what they found, in determining, in contradiction to what they were ordered, that an attack upon Rochefort

was

was not to be attempted. In the firſt place, I ſhall take leave to ſtrip them of that part of their defence, which ariſes totally from their own miſconduct, the want of having a place of retreat. When we are to judge from events of the practicability of a meaſure, we are to argue from the caſe, as it would have ſtood, if all had been done which could have been done. Fouras might have been had for a place of retreat; and it is but an unfortunate ſlip in the general, who owns, Enq. p. 28. that had Fort Fouras been taken, *there would have been great eaſe in the reſt of the enterpriſe*; I ſhall take the liberty, therefore, to conſider the army as landed, and the ſtores, &c. ſecured within the walls of that fort.

I ſhall likeways take leave to ſtrip them of that part of their defence, which ariſes from (I think, a ſort of prevarication, but certainly) a miſrepreſentation of the words of their inſtructions. They are eternally telling us of the great change between the ſtate of affairs in which they were to act, and the ſtate in which they were ſent out, ariſing from delays of various kinds, by which an alarm was ſpread, and the poſſibility of a *ſurpriſe* was prevented, and they were to act only by way of ſurpriſe. Who told them ſo? Their inſtructions, I am ſure, held no ſuch language: *To attack, and by a vigorous impreſſion, force*, Enq. page 78. Theſe were the inſtructions. If I order a man to force into a place, does it imply, that if he can't ſteal into it, he need not attempt it. He may try that method firſt, if he pleaſes. It is ſafer for himſelf; but if he can't do that, is he to decline every other attempt? where, then, is the *force* which he is to uſe?

If the inſtructions, therefore, convey no ſuch idea as confines the operations of the troops to a ſurpriſe only, is there any thing in the hints of advice given by Sir John Ligonier, whoſe opinions, founded on ſuch conſummate experience, the general in chief thought would be a juſtification to any officer. Read the paper as it ſtands together, *Enq.* pages 20th, 21ſt, 22d. He ſays, indeed, that it would perhaps be *beſt*, if the enemy *could be* ſurpriſed; but *a bold attack, after having ſecured a place of retreat, ſecured guides on the ſpot, and thoroughly reconnoitred, and fixed upon the fitteſt places*, is what is recommended and enlarged upon. But the generals, it ſeems, did not ſecure the

place

place of retreat, becauſe they would not attack; and they did not attack, becauſe they had not ſecured a place of retreat. As to the other meaſures adviſed, the getting guides on the ſpot, reconnoitring, and trying to find out fit places to attack, all theſe they omitted, for they never were on the ſpot. Of all the hints, therefore, given by that conſummate general, Sir John Ligonier, not one was carried into execution.

As to the ſtate of the French troops which were at Rochefort, I have already conſidered that point, and therefore need add little to it now. The utmoſt which the generals pretend to have imagined, amounts to no more than this: Sir John Mordaunt ſuppoſes, page 27th, that there muſt have been *a good garriſon*, beſides workmen in the docks, and the crews of the ſhips in the river. General Conway, page 39th, *from general reaſoning*, and from intelligence, *was perſuaded* there muſt be a conſiderable number of men in Rochefort: and general Cornwallis does not ſo much as mention any difficulty to be feared from the enemies troops, but puts the whole on that of landing, and the having no retreat or communication with the ſhips ſecured. Thus, then, the terrors, which you in your performance endeavoured to magnify, of the great oppoſition to be expected from the enemies troops, not only vaniſh, but it appears that the generals themſelves never adopted thoſe terrors, for they had no credible intelligence contradicting the accounts received at home; and one ſuppoſes only *a good garriſon*, and the other *a conſiderable number* of men in Rochefort.

Being maſters then of Fouras, and no body of troops then in the field to oppoſe them, they could at leaſt have marched to reconnoitre, and inſpect, *with their own eyes*, the nature of the fortifications about Rochefort. And this they might have done without danger to their troops, and without the loſs of a ſingle ſoldier. Had they found, by their own obſervation, and by incontrovertible teſtimony, that the fortifications of the place ſo far and ſo totally varied from the accounts given of them, as to make the ſucceſs, by aſſault, impoſſible, or, in a very high degree, improbable; then, and not till then, would they have been juſtified in returning to their ſhips; for then they would have performed their orders; *they would have attempted as far*

far as was found practicable. But poſterity will hardly believe, that three Engliſh generals, of noble blood, high in their maſter's favour, and high in reputation, who were ſent with a powerful armada, and a body of near 10,000 Britiſh troops under their command, upon an enterpriſe of the greateſt importance to their country, and upon which the eyes, not only of their countrymen, but all Europe, were turned with eager expectations, could conſent to come back again, even *without an attempt to reconnoitre*, leaving behind them, if not their own honour, yet certainly the honour of their country; becauſe, in a council of war *held aboard their ſhips*, there appeared a contrariety of evidence, whether the ditch about the town of Rochefort, which was ſuppoſed at their firſt ſetting out to be dry, was, in reality, a dry or wet ditch: yet, party and prejudice apart, is not this a true ſtate of the caſe? Suppoſing the troops in poſſeſſion of Fouras, which they might ſo eaſily have been, what other difficulty do the generals pretend to ſuggeſt, beſides the wet ditch?

I have ſcarce patience enough to argue with them upon the probability of this point, one way or the other; yet, as I have undertaken an irkſome task, I will go through with it. Sir John Mordaunt, in his narrative delivered into the board, is very ſhort, and not very particular in the account of what he had heard was the ſtate of the fortifications. The firſt part relates to the *open* part of the *town, where there was rampart for ſixty yards in length*; this Sir John *ſuppoſes muſt have been fortified* with an entrenchment, as, by Thierry's account, there was a paliſade, and a trench might be thrown up in 24 hours time, to which the ſhips in the river would be better flankers than a baſtion. But did Sir John go to Rochefort, in order to hear this evidence from Thierry, and to examine his plans? Surely he might have done that at home. Yet he does not ſuggeſt one ſyllable of new intelligence gained on this head ſince his arrival on the coaſt; but ſpeaks only of his own *ſuppoſitions*, in which, however, he was miſtaken. The reſt of the circumference of the town was *generally* proved, he ſays, (but it does not appear by whom,) to be ſtrong and high; but I ſhould have been glad to have ſeen the depoſitions of thoſe witneſſes who proved this; becauſe, when they ſpoke of the *general* parts being ſtrong and high,

high, it is natural to ſuppoſe they were asked ſome few queſtions as to thoſe *particular* parts which were not ſtrong and high; yet I am not ſure they were asked ſuch queſtions; and therefore I cannot but again lament the total ſuppreſſion of the evidence given to the council of war.

As to the ſtate of the ditch, two witneſſes declared they had ſeen it full of water, by means of ſluices in the town. When Sir John is interrogated on theſe points, by the board, he ſays, that there was a contradiction in the evidence given to the council of war, and that ſome of the priſoners contradicted, and ſome confirmed Col. Clerk's account.

As to the firſt part of the fortification, (I mean the open parts near the river) it appears, from thence, how much the generals were out in their reaſoning; that the long alarm upon the coaſt; the particular expectation of a viſit in thoſe parts; the preſence of a mareſchal of France, and the great alertneſs, wiſdom, and ſagacity of the people, had put every thing into ſuch a poſture of defence as might defy an attack. It appears how much better that officer reaſoned, who ſaid, *we ſhould never take it for granted that all is done which ought to be done, even in France.* Bonneau, the fiſherman, recommended to Col. Clerk, as a knowing, ſenſible fellow, by Capt. Hamilton, General Conway's aid-de-camp, aſſured him, in the preſence of Col. Wolfe, and ſeveral other perſons, that upon the 21ſt of that very month, when our fleet was on the coaſt, that very ſpot remained as open, and as unfortified as it was when Col. Clerk firſt ſaw it in the year 1754. *Enq.* page 52. But this, though reported to the general, he would not believe; he would not believe a fiſherman in the affair of fortification, becauſe he was not an engineer; and yet he would not believe the engineer of the fort of Aix, who ſaid the ditch was dry, and the town open, becauſe he was an engineer.

It ſeems to me to be one of the moſt unhappy omens for this country, that the French have gained ſuch an aſcendency over the minds of our military people, as to be conſidered by them in the light of ſuperior beings, to which our leſſer geniuſes dare not preſume to look up. "After the ſeveral intelligences we had received, ſays "the general, Enq. p. 14, that the French expected an

"invaſion

" invaſion on this part of the coaſt, and were not alarm-
" ed, *it was impoſſible to imagine* that a place like Roche-
" fort, the ſecond certainly in importance on the whole
" coaſt, ſhould, after ſuch warnings be totally neglect-
" ed." And yet it was ſo totally neglected, that an in-trenchment, which might have been thrown up with eaſe, and planted with batteries, to defend *an open entrance into the town, ſixty yards wide*, was not thrown up, even after our ſhips had been on that very coaſt. But how aſtoniſhed will our generals be when they are told that this is not the firſt time that there has been this neglect at Rochefort. There has been no alteration in the fortifications of that place theſe 70 years.

The French cdnſidered it as an open town, ſo ſaid the engineer of Aix to colonel Clarke. And yet the expedition againſt Port l'Orient, might have alarmed the French for Rochefort ſo far, at leaſt, as to throw an intrenchment round it, if that would have been ſufficient to ſecure it againſt an aſſault. It may be, and indeed it was aſtoniſhing to think, that a place ſo important as Rochefort ſhould have been no better ſecured. But for what a length of time did the principal dock yards of England ly expoſed, not only to be deſtroyed by a great force, but to be burnt by the crews of two or three privateers. But there are blunders and overſights in all governments, for which a prudent and active adverſary lies in wait to take his advantage. For the future the French will take care of Rochefort: our overſights we are unhappily taught to correct, by ſevere loſſes, while the French are taught to correct their blunders by our ſuperior blunders.

As to the ditch, if the concurrent evidence of colonel Clarke, and the French engineer, that it was a dry one, had been out of the queſtion, the contradictory evidence given before the council of war, might have been cleared up from the very ſituation of the place: it was a maxim of one of the greateſt French generals, and a French maxim will have weight with our Engliſh generals, that one ſhould never ſuppoſe a ditch to be full of water till ſome body, we can depend upon, has dipped in his finger and taſted it; yet that French general would ſcarce have taken the trouble of ſending to ſearch if there was water in a ditch which lay on the ſide of a hill. It is impoſſible

without

without ſluices, which muſt be repeated as often as the level of the ground varies, *Cela ne pourroit être a cauſe de l' inégalité du t rrein*, was what might have occurred to an Engliſh general, as well as to a French engineer. Even if there had been ſluices, to demoliſh them was not the the work of a battering train. A couple of field pieces would blow up a ſluice in half an hour, and then where would be the wet ditch?

I have heard too another thing, and I am well founded in aſſerting it. There was a certain Monſieur Bonneville, a voluntier, who went under the protection of one of our generals in this expedition. He had been about eight to nine years ſince thro' Rochefort, and great ſtreſs was laid in the council of war on the evidence that he gave, that to the beſt of his recollection, there was then water in the ditch; this evidence, tho' from ſuch long memory, was eagerly caught at; but a very deaf ear was turned to the undertaking, with which he accompanied his evidence, that *even tho' there ſhould be water, he would, by a method which he explained, make that practicable in two or three different places in the ſpace of a few minutes, and wide enough for a battalion to march in front. That the materials for this were in his power, and that the thing was no chimerical project, ſince it had been done by marſhal Lowendahl, the laſt in two ſeveral inſtances, where he himſelf was preſent and in ſervice.* But this it ſeems was too dangerous.

Whoever is acquainted with the characters of the generals concerned in this expedition, will acquit them of the imputation of perſonal cowardice; far be it from me to impute it; I declare I would not attempt to inſinuate it; they have never indeed commanded before, but they have ſerved, and ſerved with ſpirit and gallantry; their conduct therefore, on this occaſion, is more myſterious and aſtoniſhing. Of the whole which was their peculiar department, have they, or did they attempt to execute a ſingle part? The fort of Aix was taken, not by the troops, but by captain Howe; if the fleet would have taken Fouras likeways they were at full liberty to do it, and if they could have ſailed up to Rochefort, and have taken that too, it does not appear that the generals would have oppoſed it. But neither does it appear that they would have riſqu'd their ſoldiers even from Fouras; for if they once got out of the

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ſhips, who can tell whether they could get back again? Is it not aſtoniſhing that when vice admiral *Knowles* had reported the impracticability of taking it by ſea, the generals ſhould firſt lay aſide all thoughts of proſecuting the whole plan, before they ever asked whether this *neceſſary* place could be taken *without* the aſſiſtance of ſhips. When they came to reconnoitre, they found how practicable it was; ſo practicable, ſo little hazardous, that they reſolved to attack it, merely *for the ſake of employing the ſoldiers*, *Enq.* p. 109. without intending to draw any other effect from it.

It is no fault in a general to be cautious how he expoſes his troops; it is his duty not to expoſe them wantonly and raſhly: but troops muſt ſerve when the occaſions of the ſtate demand it, and ſometimes they muſt go upon hard ſervice: the queſtion was not, whether *Rochefort* could be taken without loſs; but whether *Rochefort* could be taken. A ditch, even a wet one, a wall, an intrenchment, or a battery of cannon do not make the places they defend, impregnable. They are taken every day, and taken by eſcalade and aſſault. Mareſchal *Lowendahl* took, by aſſault, ſeveral fortifications, ſurrounded by wet ditches, laſt war; yet not by ſurpriſe. Fort St. *Philip* was taken by aſſault, without a breach, tho' defended by a ſtronger garriſon than was within the ramparts of *Rochefort*: if it had not been ſo taken, it never could have been taken; and yet that attack was much more deſperate, than there was any appearance to ſuſpect that on *Rochefort* would have been. Are not intrenchments, even the ſtrongeſt, and beſt defended, continually forced? and did not the *French*, in the only ſtop they received in the dominions of *Hanover*, march up a ſteep hill, into the mouths of a battery of cannon, and take it? all theſe ſervices muſt be performed, and they can be performed, but ſtill, (I agree) with loſs. It would be happy if we could carry on war without ſhedding Chriſtian blood; but mankind is not yet ſufficiently civilized to adopt ſuch methods. "In "all doubtful, dangerous military attempts, the advan- "tages that may accrue from ſucceſs, ought to be weigh- "ed againſt the damage and misfortunes which may be "the conſequences of a repulſe." So ſays Sir *John Ligonier*, *Enq.* p. 21, in his advice to Sir *John Mordaunt*.

Our forcing, by a vigorous impreſſion, *Rochefort*, and ſeizing the ſhips and naval ſtores, burning the docks, deſtroying the foundery and cannon, and thereby crippling the *French* navy, perhaps for the reſt of this war, were ſuch advantages, as this country, in its preſent circumſtances, might, in prudence, purchaſe, even with the lives of ſome of its ſoldiers, and might thereby have ſaved the lives of many of its ſubjects.

In p. 25. of your own work, you are pleaſed to repreſent the reſolution to land, on the 28th, for the attack of *Fort Fouras*, as *an exceſs of zeal to carry on the enterpriſe, and a perſeverance in a plan which was found impracticable:* but you have forgot that the generals themſelves claim no ſuch merit, nor do they even pretend that this was attempted with a view ſtill to proceed againſt *Rochefort*; Quite the contrary. The general himſelf, *Enq.* p. 109, repreſents it as ſomething to employ the troops before they went home, while the fortifications of *Aix* were blowing up, but being prevented from landing that night, and the fleet being ready the next morning, they did not think it worth while to ſtay another day. They were ſo determined by the contradictory evidence given at the council of war, and ſo fixed in their reſolution, in no ſituation to attack *Rochefort*, that it was not worth while to detain the fleet *a day*, in order to take a place, which if the ſeamen had taken at firſt, the general ſays the reſt of *the enterpriſe would have been eaſy*, and from whence they might, with ſafety, have informed their own eyes of the exact ſituation of the town.

You are pleaſed to expreſs an high contempt of the *idea* of giving any blow to *France*, not only in any part of the land frontiers, but of that immenſe tract of land which ſpreads for ſo great an extent through different ſeas; and you ſhelter yourſelf under one axiom of *Schomberg*, "That attacking *France* in *France*, was taking a bull "by the horns." And another of the great *victor Amadeus* of *Savoy*, "That he knew a thouſand ways into "*France*, but none out of it."

This is another inſtance of what I have before lamented, as an unhappy omen to this country, that even great ſtateſmen can adopt the maxim, that the wiſdom and power of *France* render her invulnerable. Yet I did not

expect

expect that you, of all men living, would have endeavoured to expoſe the abſurdity of taking the bull by the horns; you who have been, who continue to be, the grand advocate for land operations, and for ſending the force of this iſland upon the continent. I will agree, indeed, that neither in the laſt war, nor perhaps in the preſent, was there much probability that our troops ſhould enter *France*. So much the worſe for us. But do you make no difference between attacking ſuch a barrier as *France* has towards *Flanders*, or even attacking it from the ſide of *Italy*, and the ſending a ſuperior fleet to ſtorm at once a place ſituated on the coaſt, which the generals were not inſtructed *to hold and maintain*, but to deſtroy, and then go on board their ſhips? the way back, if the fleet continued ſuperior, was juſt as eaſy as the way thither.

But tho' I differ from you in that opinion, we agree exactly in another, which you advance; I mean the great importance of *Cape Breton*, and the blow which *France* would receive in the loſs of it; yet if, as you obſerve juſtly, it would *now be a folly to be ſurpriſed at any thing*, I ſhould have been a little ſurpriſed to hear the neglect of that object charged as an imputation on the miniſter, whom you and *yours* have ſo often ridiculed, as *America*-mad. Muſt I really ask the queſtion? Was that great object forgot? Has the war in *America* in general, or a plan of attack on that place in particular, been neglected by him; or was it his ſcramble for power? Was it his junto, or his party cabal that ſuſpended or weakened the operation? look back a few months. When was the attack of that place projected? and when was the armament fitted out and prepared for the execution? Was it not in that very hour when you and yours were with ſo much decency and humanity ridiculing a bed-ridden miniſter, and repreſenting him to be as impotent in his mental faculties as he was in his bodily ſtate? Was not that armament prepared by the then board of admiralty, with an expedition that ſhewed they were no ſtrangers to buſineſs, how much ſoever they might be ridiculed as novices in office? Was it not ready to ſail ſix weeks ſooner than any armament could be ſent from the ports of *France*, notwithſtanding the utmoſt exertions of that wiſe and alert people? Was it not ſufficient for the ſervice, and in-

finitely ſuperior to any thing which at that time could oppoſe it in *America?* When by a ſeries of adverſe winds, the departure of that armament had been delayed ſo many weeks, and till the *French* fleets were ready to put to ſea, was there not a reinforcement of ſix capital ſhips *ordered* by that admiralty, to be added to thoſe originally deſtined to that ſervice, and which were to follow them as ſoon as poſſible? I affirm that there was. How that reinforcement came to be applied to other purpoſes, you beſt can tell, ſince it was thro' your ſcramble for power, thro' your junto, thro' your party cabal, that a diſmiſſion was given, in that critical conjuncture, to that board of admiralty, and the miniſter with whom it was connected. The ſucceeding board happened to be of a different opinion from the preceding one, and the reinforcement deſtined for the attack of *Louisbourg*, was (I do not ſay perverted but) converted to other purpoſes. To *cruiſe upon the trade of* France, was, by that board, thought the beſt method of deſtroying the enemy, and inſtead of a chimerical attack upon *Louisbourg* or *Rochefort*, the fleet of *England* was immediately exerted in what the *French* call the piratical kind of war: a kind of war, which I ſuppoſe, is the fitteſt for the fleet of *England*, becauſe the *French* ridicule it the moſt; and ſure I am, that our maritime officers not only applaud it the moſt, but ſeem of late years to have turned their thoughts to little elſe.

As ſoon as the ſix week's admiralty retired, and gave way to the preſent board, and the preſent miniſter was ordered to reſume the functions of that office, which not a man in England dared to fill after him, the American ſyſtem reſumed its vigour. Such ſhips as could be collected, though not equal, either in ſtrength or numbers, to what had been originally deſtined to that ſervice, were immediately ſent to reinforce thoſe at Halifax; and I do again affirm, and am prepared to prove, that, except a very ſhort time, in which the ſquadron of Mr. Holbourne was by the beforementioned accidents, by a ſingle ſhip, perhaps, inferior to the French, he had under his command, during the whole ſummer, a fleet ſuperior to any thing the French had at Louisbourg, or could, by any means whatever, bring there, whether you conſider the number of line of battle ſhips, the number of men on board, the number of

guns,

guns, or the weight of their metal; and yet almoſt the whole maritime force of France, ſo far as it could be manned, was by ſtratagem collected there. Was it then ſo very abſurd and romantic, that when their maritime force was drawn away to America, and their land forces engaged in Germany, the reſerved ſtrength of this country ſhould be exerted in attempting a blow ſo very deciſive, as the taking of Rochefort would have been? why it miſcarried, to this moment, I can hardly gueſs; but ſure I am, it was not through the impracticability of it.

I have now, Sir, gone through the conſideration of your whole performance, and if you are not tired with reading, I confeſs I am heartily tired with writing. I have endeavoured to keep as cloſe as poſſible to the ſubject, and tho' often tempted, I have indulged few ſallies of my pen; if now and then you ſhould have found a little deviation, a little playfulneſs of imagination, forgive it. 'Tis but a copy of my countenance; 'tis but a forced ſmile that covers a bleeding heart: a heart broken and bleeding for the diſtreſs, for the diſgrace of this country. Where, alas! can we look, whether can we direct our hopes? Under which of thoſe dark clouds that ſurround, and ſeem ready to burſt upon us; can we flatter ourſelves there is a ray of light that will break forth? To what purpoſe is it that we boaſt our trade, our wealth, and our credit? We are but ſo many ſheep, whoſe carcaſes tempt the wolves to devour us. Where is the glory of the Britiſh name; where are the terrors that uſed to accompany our fleets and armies? the treaſures of the country are poured forth in vain by an united and willing people. Our enemies are become invulnerable, and every blow our miniſters meditate, impracticable. In Germany their ravages are not ſtopped for a ſingle hour, for there were not ſo many men in the German as in the French army; therefore to check their progreſs is impracticable. In America, where our troops are at leaſt double to thoſe of the enemy, to check their progreſs is equally impracticable. To deſtroy their docks at Rochefort, a town conſidered in France as an open town, without baſtions, without fortifications, without a wall for its defence, is impracticable: for 'tis moſt certain there was a ditch, and ſomebody ſaid there was water in it.

Such

Such is the ſum total of the preſent account of our military operations, and can we look forward with a better proſpect? as to our fleet, we have been our own undoers, and have killed the pampered child with kindneſs. We have deſtroyed the principle which was the ſource of our glory. We have miſguided the ambition of our ſeamen; we have tempted them with wealth inſtead of reputation; and we have ſubſtituted avarice to honour. We have at this hour many who would make brave and excellent corſairs, and I hope that in the long liſt we have two or three good admirals.

As to the army, the ſoldiers are ſtill brave, and, I am perſuaded, will fight, whenever their commanders will lead them on; there is ſome comfort in that. But what are the commanders? Read over the liſt of general officers. I am ſure you will agree with me, that thoſe who were picked out as *choſen men*, to command the expedition againſt Rochefort, at that time ſtood among the firſt for character and reputation. From their conduct on this occaſion, we may judge what we are to expect for the future.

But alas! the call, the enthuſiaſtic call of glory and honour, is heard no more among us; we are grown a ſolid and wiſe people; we have ſubſtituted realities to chimæras, and we ſeek after eſſentials rather than empty, popular applauſe. *Populus me ſibilat, at mihi plaudo.* Who is there, in this enlightened day, who has not courage enough to withſtand popular clamour? No wonder! What does a man get by being popular, and who is there that thinks any farther than *how he can get?* Is he a ſoldier, of family perhaps, of rank, of p——y connections, and foſtered in the boſom of ſome powerful faction. Shall ſuch a man expoſe himſelf, uncalled, uncommiſſioned by his faction? Shall he brave danger in order to ſerve *only* his country, and at the ſame time, perhaps, encreaſe the reputation of ſome abſurd, chimerical beggar of a miniſter, who is fool enough to think his country worth ſerving, under the moſt unpleaſant circumſtances, and in the moſt dangerous conjunctures. Why ſhould he? His faction will be powerful enough to ſecure his future preferment; they will ſtand between him and danger; they will reſcue him from

from punishment; they will rescue him from the resentment of his s——; they will rescue him from every thing but *dishonour*.

I am,

Yours, &c.

POST.

POSTSCRIPT.

THO' I have not, in the courſe of this letter, affected a candour more than is common to thoſe who engage in political diſputes, yet the reader will think it extraordinary that I have not availed myſelf of the intelligence lately brought from Rochelle and Rochefort, by the captain of the tranſport veſſel, who was a priſoner in that country at the time our armament came to that coaſt. The truth is, I diſdained to prejudice the mind of the reader by a teſtimony of that ſort, and I determined that he ſhould judge of the conduct of the generals in this expedition, from the ſame evidence on which they might be ſuppoſed to act. But as his opinion of the generals, and their conduct, is by this time formed, it is a debt due to truth, and to the public, to ſay, (what is already well known to moſt of the merchants of the city of London,) that at the time our fleet was at the iſle of Aix, the whole force which the enemy had on that coaſt, conſiſted of a battalion of regular troops in the iſle of Rhe, another in Oleron, a Swiſs battalion at Rochelle, and one regiment of regulars, and one of militia at Rochefort. That the Prudente, a French ſhip of 74 guns, *with all her cannon* and ſtores, &c. on board, eſcaped our fleet, by running up to Rochefort, thro' that very channel, which was not deep enough for an Engliſh long-boat, and that the conſternation on the coaſt was not to be expreſſed, it being underſtood, that in the courſe of a few days, both Rochefort and Rochelle would neceſſarily fall into the hands of the Engliſh, there being no poſſibility to reinforce them, till the houſhold troops could arrive from Verſailles.

Z
Hardwg
1946